

RELIEF Act and FOCUS Act would undermine efforts to prevent illegal logging and importing

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Earl Blumenauer testified before the Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs on two bills that would repeal significant portions of the Lacey Act.

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The Lacey Act, originally passed in 1900, prohibits trade in products that were illegally harvested in their country of origin. In 2008, the Act was amended to add provisions of the Legal Timber Protection Act, legislation authored by Congressman Blumenauer, which would include wood and wood products in this prohibition. Illegal logging threatens not only ecologically important forests around the world but also subjects the U.S. forest products industry – including many in Oregon - to unfair and illegal competition. The two bills that are under consideration today, the RELIEF Act (H.R. 3210) and the FOCUS Act (H.R. 4171), would devastate these protections by reducing financial penalties for violators, gutting longstanding forfeiture requirements, exempting non-solid wood products, removing many of the enforcement mechanisms needed to carry out the law, and removing the requirement that U.S. companies comply with certain foreign laws.

“There is so much that’s broken in our government,” said Congressman Blumenauer, “that it seems a terrible shame to take the Lacey Act, one of the best examples of effective legislation we have, and smash it into pieces. The Lacey Act not only protects the resources of developing nations from exploitation, but jobs here at home. With the RELIEF and FOCUS Acts, we’re talking about no longer requiring U.S. companies to follow the laws of other countries in which they do business.”

The amendments to the Lacey Act in 2008 were developed by a broad coalition including the timber industry, consumers, importers, labor unions, and conservationists, and they passed with

the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate as well as the Bush administration. Opposition to the RELIEF and FOCUS Acts is also broad, including the League of Conservation Voters, the Hardwood Federation, the American Forest and Paper Association, the Sierra Club, and the United Steelworkers.

“We have representatives from the American timber industry sitting down with environmental advocates and government regulators,” continued Blumenauer. “They are all committed to making the Lacey Act work rather than undermining its effectiveness. Everyone’s on the same page, except for the very fringe who don’t want to play by the rules under any circumstances.”

